

Dr. DeBakey was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom with distinction in 1969 and the National Medal of Science from President Ronald Reagan in 1987. I want to thank Dr. DeBakey and my former colleague, Chris Bell, for initiating the legislation that will allow us to award him the Congressional Gold Medal. He is deserving on his birthday of September 7 when he reached almost 100 years old. He is deserving of this great honor. We in Houston love him and admire him. We thank him for the service he has given and all of the lives that he has served. This is a great day when we have passed legislation to honor Dr. Michael E. DeBakey of Houston Texas, the Texas Medical Center, with a Congressional Gold Medal.

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CARDOZA). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

FREQUENCY OF WITNESS INTIMIDATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Mr. Speaker, this evening I will continue my discussion on a growing and often deadly plague on our society, witness intimidation.

Each day, there is a story reported about civic-minded citizens being threatened with violence or becoming victims of fire bombings or shootings, all of which are designed to prevent them from testifying to crimes that they have witnessed.

Unfortunately, these tactics are working to form what has become commonly known as a "conspiracy of silence." Witnesses are literally afraid for their lives. If you do not believe me, listen to these recent reports: in Newark, New Jersey, for 2 years Reginald Roe was the star and sole witness that prosecutors were relying on in a case involving an ambush gang killing in a parking lot there. Having picked two men's pictures out of a photo array and sworn before a grand jury, he said: "I saw everything, I was there."

But when the case came to trial, with a group of gang members glaring at him in open court, Roe changed his story, testifying that he had heard the shots, but never saw who fired them. The two suspects were acquitted.

In Philadelphia, as the culture of fear continues to deter witnesses from coming forward, a Federal grand jury accused a drug dealer and his girlfriend of conspiring to intimidate a government witness by having the witness's neighborhood plastered with flyers labeling him "a rat and a snitch."

In Parachute, Colorado, Garfield County deputies arrested five teenagers

they believed threatened to beat someone with a baseball bat who planned to testify against them.

In my hometown of Baltimore, a 16-year-old witness in the case of the murder of 15-year-old Christine Richardson was moved from the city by relatives due to mounting threats. Indeed, the teenager was beaten the day after the murder occurred and was threatened by three girls, one of whom brandished a gun.

Mr. Speaker, the current situation is simply unacceptable. We should be making it easier for witnesses of crime to come forward. It should be the norm, rather than an odd occurrence, for criminals to be prosecuted. This issue must be addressed because without witnesses, there can be no justice in America.

Some success stories do exist. On August 31, Baltimore City State's Attorney Patricia Jessamy was able to get a witness to testify, which helped secure the conviction of 39-year-old Joseph Brinkley on two counts of attempted first-degree murder and handgun charges. In November of 2005, Brinkley approached two men as they hailed a cab and shot them in the back multiple times with a 9 millimeter semi-automatic handgun. The victim originally told detectives that he did not see the shooter, but recanted his statement after Brinkley approach him and his 9-year-old son.

Unfortunately, such bravery is rare. Our constituents must know that taking an interest in their community and reporting crime is the right thing to do and that the government will do everything possible to ensure their safety.

This is why I urge my colleagues to become a cosponsor of H.R. 933, the Witness Security and Protection Act of 2007, and to support its passage when it comes to the House floor. Upon enactment, this legislation authorizes \$90 million a year over the next 3 years to assist State and local law enforcement for witness protection while fostering Federal, State, and local partnerships. Priority will be given to prosecuting offices in States with an average of at least 100 murders during the immediate past 5 years; however, smaller entities also have a chance to receive funding.

State and local prosecutors will also be able to use these funds to provide witness protection on their own or to pay the cost of enrolling their witnesses in the short-term State witness protection program to be created within the U.S. Marshal Service.

Mr. Speaker, finally, improving protection for State and local witnesses will move us one step closer toward alleviating the fears of and threats to prospective witnesses and help to safeguard our communities from violence.

CONSTITUTION DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CONAWAY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, the Preamble of the Constitution reads: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

On this day, 220 years ago, the 55 delegates to the Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia to hold their final meeting and sign a document that would change the course of history. Our Founding Fathers created a monumental plan to govern a sprawling young country dedicated to the idea that citizens were sovereign and should be as free from the tyranny of unchecked authority.

Constitution Day presents us with an opportunity to pause and reflect on what a magnificent job these 55 individuals did in crafting a compromise which has provided us with a unified and stable Nation. In their wisdom, they sought to protect the rights and liberties of individuals by dividing power and authority between States and the national government. The result is a system of shared roles designed to prevent any one element from gaining too much power.

Members of Congress have taken an oath to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution and with that responsibility in mind it is vital for us to fully understand this sacred document. That is why today on the 220th anniversary of the signing of our Constitution I am introducing the AMERICA Act: A Modest Effort to Read and Instill the Constitution Again.

The AMERICA Act simply states that Members of Congress, Senators, and their respective staff read the Constitution annually.

Mr. Speaker, we Members of Congress are pledged to uphold this Constitution, to defend this Constitution, write the laws that implement this Constitution and from time to time propose constitutional amendments to change this Constitution. It is my hope that this modest yearly effort will renew and deepen our appreciation for the brilliance of the Constitution and the division and constraints on power contained within it.

The AMERICA Act is meant to be a reminder to lawmakers to stay within our country's founding framework as we conduct our legislative business. To our detriment, we often take the path of political expedience and ignore the limits so clearly written into the Constitution.

Today, I call on all Members of Congress to join me and rededicate ourselves to our founding principles of limited, constrained governance as enshrined in our Constitution. By studying our founding document, we will continue the legacy of these great men and their groundbreaking ideas, as well as develop the habits of citizenship